

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8385

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EO 11652: GDS

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SUBJ: RUMORS OF CABINET CHANGES

1. LESS THAN 3 MONTHS AFTER PRESIDENT CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ'S MAJOR CABINET RESHUFFLE JANUARY 23, RUMORS OF IMMINENT CABINET CHANGES ARE AGAIN CIRCULATING IN CARACAS. TWO PROMINENT CARAQUENOS WITH GOOD AD CONNECTIONS TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR APRIL 10 A NUMBER OF CABINET CHANGES WOULD BE MADE SHORTLY. COPEI SECRETARY GENERAL PEDRO PABLO AGUILAR DURING APRIL 11 CONVERSATION WITH CHARGE REFERRED TO SERIOUS DISAGREEMENTS BETWEEN PEREZ AND AD PARTY AND HINTED AT SEVERAL CHANGES IN CABINET. SENSATIONALIST DAILY EL MUNDO APRIL 10 REPORTED PEREZ STUDYING POSSIBLE CHANGES IN CABINET, STATE GOVERNORS, AND HEADS OF AUTONOMOUS INSTITUTIONS.

2. AMONG THOSE RUMORED TO BE ON THE WAY OUT ARE MINISTER OF MINES AND HYDROCARBONS VALENTIN HERNANDEZ ACOSTA AND MINISTER OF STATE FOR VENEZUELAN INVESTMENT FUND CONSTANTINO QUERO MORALES. WHILE THE POSSIBILITY THAT HERNANDEZ WILL LEAVE THE CABINET IS VERY SPECULATIVE INDEED, QUERO'S DEPARTURE WOULD SEEM TO BE A SAFER BET DUE TO A RECOMMENDATION BY A CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE CORRUPTION FOR AN INVESTIGATION INTO A DEAL QUERO MADE LAST YEAR WHILE HEAD OF THE AGRICULTURAL MARKETING CORPORATION INVOLVING THE SALE TO A US COMPANY OF REFRIGERATED AMMONIA ALLEGEDLY AT LESS THAN THE THEN-GOING PRICE.

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3. THE RECENT ROUND OF RUMORS THAT HERNANDEZ IS ABOUT TO BE RE-

PLACED WOULD SEEM TO BE BASED FOR THE MOST PART ON THE RECENT LEAKING OF CONFIDENTIAL MINISTRY DOCUMENTS TO THE PEOPLE'S ELECTORAL MOVEMENT (MEP) CONCERNING THE CONTROVERSIAL PENTACOM PROPOSAL FOR DEVELOPMENT OF THE PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY AND A MOBIL LETTER PROPOSING FUTURE FORMS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN MOBIL AND THE GOV. MEP'S REVELATION OF LEAKED DOCUMENTS IS POPULARLY BELIEVED TO HAVE LED TO THE DISMISSAL BY PRESIDENT PEREZ LAST WEEK OF MINISTRY OF MINES DIRECTOR GENERAL FERNANDO BAEZ DUARTE AS THE PRIME SUSPECT FOR THE INFRACTION. HOWEVER, THE EMBASSY HAS HEARD THAT THE REAL REASON FOR BAEZ'S DISMISSAL WAS PEREZ'S AND CABINET'S DIS-SATISFACTION WITH HIS GENERAL PERFORMANCE DURING LONG ABSENCES

OF HERNANDEZ ON OFFICIAL TRIPS AND FOR RECUPERATION FROM AN AUTO ACCIDENT. WHILE HERNANDEZ MAY BE SAFE FOR THE TIME BEING, REPUBLICAN DEMOCRATIC UNION (URD) EX-SENATOR LEONARDO MONTIEL ORTEGA, WHO IS ANXIOUS TO SUCCEED HERNANDEZ AS MINISTER OF MINES, TOLD POLITICAL COUNSELOR APRIL 11 THAT HE MAY BECOME MINISTER AFTER THE OIL NATIONALIZATION BILL IS PASSED, BUT NOT BEFORE. OTHER POLITICIANS ARE ALSO KNOWN TO BE SNIPING FOR HERNANDEZ'S JOB DUE TO THE POWER BASE IT PROVIDES FOR THOSE WITH PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS.

4. EL MUNDO ARTICLE ALSO REFERRED TO POSSIBLE SHIFTS AT DEFENSE, JUSTICE AND FINANCE MINISTRIES. IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT MINISTER OF DEFENSE MAJOR GENERAL HOMERO LEAL TORRES WILL RETIRE IN JULY UPON REACHING THE LIMIT OF THIRTY YEARS SERVICE IN THE ARMED FORCES. THERE HAS BEEN A GREAT DEAL OF SPECULATION REGARDING WHICH OF THE PRESENT COMMANDERS OF THE 3 ARMED SERVICES WILL SUCCEED HIM.

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